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Victory for the eco warrior

There is arrangement to occupy land says judge, as they win stay of exe

By Eleanor Davis

ECO villagers living in woodland in Englefield Green are claiming victory after a court ruling that could allow them to remain until after the Magna Carta anniversary celebrations.

Runnymede Eco-Village, has been home to a collection of individuals and families who started building a community of wooden structures in 2012.

It was once the Brunel University Runnymede Campus. But the inhabitants have been issued with an eviction notice by landowners Orchid Runnymede.

Orchid have planning permission to demolish the former university campus and build a collection of care homes, student accommodation units, private homes and affordable housing near the Eco-Village.

However, at a hearing yesterday (Thursday) at Guildford County Court, District Judge Kubiak granted an adjournment after representatives for the landowners asked for an order for possession of the land, on the grounds of trespassing.

Adjourning the case for the villagers to serve their defence, Judge Kubiak said: "It appears to me that there is some arrangement in place in some shape or form to occupy this land."

They now have until April 24 to put a defence together, ahead of the next hearing, expected in May.



Power to the people: Joy and relief for members of the Runnymede Eco-Village outside Guildford County Court after they are given 14 days to put their defence together.

Speaking afterwards, Peter Phoenix, who has lived in sustainable communities, with squatters and eco-villagers for 20 years, said he hoped it would raise awareness of the need for land for similar communities to live on.

"That was a major victory," he said. "The law is stacked in favour of the landowner. "Maybe people want to offer some bits of land for people to live on."

He said the group gathered by the Magna Carta memorial on Runnymede Meadow in 2012 when deciding to create the Eco-Village and would put banners out to raise awareness of their threats of eviction during the celebrations, should they still be there.

Another resident named Vinny, 48, said the village was home to around 40 people, as

those facing homelessness in London often visited for support and to attend workshops.

"We provide security and respite for the displaced community," he said.

"The site that we are on is not part of the building before the hearing, one of

development. Our being here should have no interference with the development."

He said the development and risk of eviction had been in the backs of their minds for some time.

"It's ironic that two months before the Magna Carta

anniversary, the system is trying to stamp out a community that live in freedom.

"We have got gardeners, psychologists, carers and a couple of builders living on site and run workshops for children - it's a real joy to see."

During the hearing, one of